

John Machar

Age: 25

Region: Upper Nile

One night bombing started and everyone fled. I was 6 years old and ran with my 15-years-old cousin, Koang. We hid in the bush. In the morning, people gathered together, but my parents were not among them. My cousin and I followed others walking to Ethiopia. We lived in a refugee camp for three years until fighting broke out. We walked to Pochala on the border and had no food and water for several days. Antonov bombers attacked us so we couldn't make a fire. Over a thousand people were hiding in the bush.

One of the hardest things was crossing the Gilo and Sobat Rivers. There were crocodiles and large rapids. People held hands while crossing, but some let go and drowned.

I lived at the Kakuma Refugee Camp for 12 years. We built our own shelter. Four people lived in a small 7'x4' space. 1994, Koang was resettled in Nebraska and had to leave me behind.

I came to the U.S. in 2001. In Phoenix, we were taken to an apartment and briefly instructed on how to use the phone, TV and appliances. We were told to call 911 if we had a problem. If we call 911 who will talk to us? Don't worry, someone will be there, we were told. It was hard to do things here because we have to get people to help us, but there was nothing to do in the camp in Africa. I like more activities and it's good to learn different things.

I took a bus to see my cousin in Nebraska in January 2003. He wanted me to stay, but it was too cold for me.

I've been working at a steel company operating machines and going to Phoenix College. I'm studying English and physics. I would like to be a pilot, but it's very expensive. I wish the U.S. would improve our center to help us more.